The syntax of noun phrase internal lexical possessors in Tundra Nenets

András Bárány & Irina Nikolaeva, SOAS University of London

andras.barany@soas.ac.uk

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1 Introduction: Lexical possessors in Tundra Nenets

Tundra Nenets (TN; Samoyedic, Uralic; Russia) has two types of lexical possessors which are internal to the DP (Nikolaeva 2014, Nikolaeva & Bárány to appear).

- Both types of lexical possessors are in the genitive: (1a,b)
- Only one type controls agreement on the possessed noun: (1b)

(1) a. Maša-h wēsako
   Masha-GEN husband
   ‘Masha’s husband’

   b. Maša-h wēsako-da
   Masha-GEN husband-3SG
   ‘Masha’s husband’

The two types of lexical possessors differ in another syntactic property:

- Regular lexical possessors are lower in the DP and follow demonstratives: (2a)
- Possessors controlling agreement are higher in the DP and precede demonstratives: (2b)

(2) a. tʻuku° Wera-h ti / *te-da
    this Wera-GEN reindeer
    ‘this reindeer of Wera’s’

   b. Wera-h tʻuku° te-da / *ti
    Wera-GEN this reindeer-3SG
    ‘this reindeer of Wera’s’

We call agreement-controlling possessors prominent internal possessors (PIPs).
Today’s talk

In spite of their DP-internal position PIPs show at least two clause-level properties

A The distribution of PIPs is restricted by other third person DPs in the clause (§3)

B PIPs can act as switch-reference pivots (§4)

→ We derive A as an effect of an obviation system in TN
  - PIPs are proximate
  - They compete with other proximate DPs and cannot co-occur with them

→ We derive B from the position of PIPs in the DP
  - PIPs can c-command out of SpecDP
  - This allows them to control out of the DP

2 Evidence for internal possession in TN

Low possessors and PIPs are DP-internal: they cannot be separated from the possessed noun by adverbs, (3a); they appear as a constituent under contrastive focus, (3b); and they can be coordinated with other NPs, (3c).

(3) a. \( \text{yetr'í} \) [ Wera-h (*yetr'í) te-x'naq-ta ] to°-dəm-č°
    always Wera-gen always reindeer-loc.pl-3sg come-1sg-pst
    ‘I (always) arrived on Wera’s reindeer.’ (Nikolaeva 2014: 144)

b. [ Pet’a-h ña-m-ta ] yad°btas-d’m, Maša-m ñī-w°
    Petya-gen friend-acc-3sg meet-1sg Masha-acc neg-1sg.sbj>sg.obj
    ‘I met Petya’s friend, not Masha.’

c. [ Pet’a-h ña-da təd’ekəxət° pidor° ] to°-d’ih
    Petya-gen friend-3sg then 2sg come-2du
    ‘Petya’s friend and you came (together).’

External possession involves topicalisation and is only possible with subjects, (4a); objects cannot host external possessors, (4b).

(4) a. Wera-h t’eñana [sbj ñabako-da ] xal’a-də-mí ta-ś°
    Wera-gen yesterday elder.sister-3sg fish-pred-acc.1sg give-pst
    ‘As for Wera, his sister gave me some fish.’

b.*? Wera-h t’eñana [obj ñabako-m-ta ] ladorŋa-dəm-ś°
    Wera-gen yesterday elder.sister-acc-3sg beat-1sg-pst
    intended: ‘As for Wera, I beat up his sister yesterday.’ (Nikolaeva 2014: 222)
3 The distribution of PIPs

The distribution of PIPs is restricted by other third person DPs in the clause. PIPs cannot co-occur with the following types of DPs:

1. Third person subjects (unless they host the PIP), see (5)
2. Third person objects triggering agreement on the verb (unless they host the PIP), see (6)
3. Free-standing third person pronouns, see (7)

In (5a), with a first person subject, the object can appear with a regular possessor or a PIP. In (5b), with a third person subject, a PIP is ungrammatical.

(5) a. First person subject compatible with PIP

\[ \text{məń°} \quad [\text{obj} \ Wera-h \ ti-m \ / \ \text{te-m-ta}] \quad \text{lado°-d°m} \]
1SG Wera-GEN reindeer-ACC reindeer-ACC-3SG hit-1SG
‘I hit Wera’s reindeer.’

b. Third person subject incompatible with PIP

\[ \text{Maša} \quad [\text{obj} \ Wera-h \ ti-m \ / \ *\text{te-m-ta}] \quad \text{lado°} \]
Masha Wera-GEN reindeer-ACC reindeer-ACC-3SG hit.3SG
‘Masha hit Wera’s reindeer.’

In (6a), a regular lexical possessor co-occurs with object agreement on the verb. In (6b), a PIP is ungrammatical in the context of object agreement, even if the object is disjoint.

(6) a. Regular possessor on subject compatible with object agreement

\[ [\text{sbj} \ Wera-h \ \text{ńe’ka}] \quad \text{lado°-da} \]
Wera-GEN brother hit-3SG.SBJ>SG.OBJ
‘Wera’s brother hit him/her.’

b. PIP on subject incompatible with object agreement

\[ * [\text{sbj} \ Wera-h \ \text{ńe’ka-da}] \quad \text{lado°-da} \]
Wera-GEN brother-3SG hit-3SG.SBJ>SG.OBJ
intended: ‘Wera’s brother hit him/her.’

c. PIP on object compatible with object agreement

\[ [\text{obj} \ Wera-h \ \text{ŋəno-m-ta}] \quad \text{sulor-p’iwə-ś} \]
Wera-GEN boat-ACC-3SG fix-DUR.1SG.SBJ>SG.OBJ-PST
‘I fixed Wera’s boat.’
3. The distribution of PIPs

(7) a. Implied object compatible with PIP

\[
\text{Petya-GEN brother-ACC brother-ACC-3SG send-PST.1SG}
\]

‘I sent Peter’s brother (to someone).’

b. Free-standing third person pronoun incompatible with PIP

\[
\text{Petya-GEN brother-ACC brother-ACC-3SG 3SG.DAT send-PST.1SG}
\]

‘I sent Peter’s brother to him/her.’

(5)–(7) do not look like binding violations, as there need not be coreference in the contexts that involve PIPs.

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**Interim summary: distribution of PIPs in the clause**

- PIPs on the object are ungrammatical with third person subjects
- PIPs on subject are ungrammatical with third person object agreement on the verb
- PIPs cannot co-occur with free-standing third person pronouns (nom, acc or dat)

3.1 Syntactic obviation

Given that the restrictions in (5)–(7) all depend on third person DPs, it is plausible that **obviation** is involved. Obviation governs the co-occurrence of third person DPs in a given syntactic domain (i.a. Dahlstrom 1986a,b, Jeanne & Hale 1987, Aissen 1997, Bruening 2001, Lochbihler 2012). In obviation systems, a single DP per clause can be proximate (“**Proximate Uniqueness**”).

Following Bruening (2001) we assume that a formal feature expresses the property of being proximate. We refer to this uninterpretable feature as \([u\text{Prox}].\)

The distribution of PIPs follows from a **syntactic obviation** system in the language, subject to Proximate Uniqueness (cf. Aissen 1997).

- Third person argument DPs can be assigned a \([u\text{Prox}]\) feature in syntax
- PIPs are **inherently** \([u\text{Prox}]\)
- \([u\text{Prox}]\) is unvalued and needs to agree with a head H (cf. Bruening 2001)
- Only one \([u\text{Prox}]\) feature can be valued in the syntax
- Cooccurrence of a PIP and another \([u\text{Prox}]\) DP leaves one feature unvalued
3.2 Assigning $[uProx]$

Two factors determine which argument receives $[uProx]$ from the verb:

- Whether a DP is a pronoun or not
- The DP’s syntactic height

In the case of pronouns, a third person pronoun is assigned $[uProx]$:

- Presumably due to the inherent grammaticalised animacy of personal pronouns in TN
- If there are several third person pronouns, the highest is assigned $[uProx]$

For third person lexical DPs, the highest lexical DP is assigned $[uProx]$:

- Either a subject or an agreement-controlling ACC object is assigned $[uProx]$

This matches observations by *i.a.* Dryer (1992), Aissen (1997) that animacy and grammatical function determine proximate status.

3.3 Deriving Proximate Uniqueness

A functional head $H$ below the CP domain carries $[iProx]$, the counterpart to $[uProx]$ (cf. Bruening 2001, Lochbihler 2012). We assume that DPs with an unvalued $[uProx]$ feature must enter a Reverse Agree relation (Zeijlstra 2012, Wurmbrand 2014) with $H$ in order to value $[uProx]$, resulting in $[uProx: Prox]$, shown in (8b). $H$ can value only one goal.

$$\text{(8) Reverse Agree}$$

\begin{align*}
\text{a. Agree} & \quad H \quad [iProx: Prox] \quad \ldots \\
& \quad \ldots \quad \vdash vP \\
& \quad \text{DP (sbj)} \quad [uProx: ___] \quad \ldots \\
\text{b. Valuation} & \quad H \quad [iProx: Prox] \quad \ldots \\
& \quad \ldots \quad \vdash vP \\
& \quad \text{DP (sbj)} \quad [uProx: Prox] \quad \ldots
\end{align*}

We assume with Kalin (2018) (cf. also Pesetsky & Torrego 2007) that uninterpretable and unvalued features crash the derivation while uninterpretable valued features and interpretable features do not. This can derive Proximate Uniqueness, as shown in (9).
4 PIPS and switch-reference

PIPs but not low possessors can participate in ‘non-canonical’ switch-reference (SR) (Comrie 1983, Stirling 1993, Haspelmath 1995, McKenzie 2012, de Sousa 2016). The converb in -(š/ć)° is a same subject-converb (ss) when the subject of the converbial clause is null, see (10), (11). The main clause subject controls the embedded null subject; the the subject’s low possessor cannot.

(10) [ tol°-h ʼtʼaxʼna ŋamt’o-° ] Wera Petʼa-m məneqŋa
table-gen at sit-ss.cvb Wera Petya-ACC see.3SG
‘Wera_i saw Petya_j while ∅_i,j sitting at the table.’

(11) [ tol°-h ʼtʼaxʼna ŋamt’o-° ] Wera-h ńiša Petʼa-m məneqŋa
table-gen at sit-ss.cvb Wera-GEN father Petya-ACC see.3SG
‘Wera_i’s father_j saw Petya_k while ∅_i,j,k sitting at the table.’ (Nikolaeva 2014: 378)
A PIP of the subject, however, can control the subject of a converbial clause.

- In (12), the possessor precedes the demonstrative, so must be a PIP
- The null subject of the converbial clause corefers with the main clause subject’s possessor

(12) **PIPs controls coreference**

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Pet}^\text{a}-\text{h} \quad \text{t}^\text{uku}^\circ \quad \text{ŋ}^\text{æ}-\text{da} \quad \text{ye}^\text{š}^\text{ma} \\
\text{Petya-GEN this leg-3SG.POSS start.hurting.3SG table-GEN at sit-SS.CVB}
\end{array}
\]

‘This leg of Petya’s started hurting when he was sitting at the table.’

- This is a morphosyntactic, not a pragmatic restriction
- With low possessors, coreference controlled by possessors is impossible, cf. (13)
- We assume the subject of the converb to be PRO (cf. Sundaresan & McFadden 2009, McFadden & Sundaresan 2018, Nikolaeva & Bárány to appear, Göksel & Öztürk to appear)

→ Cannot be logophoric (Williams 1992, Sichel 2010) or non-obligatory control (Landau 2013)

(13) a. Coreference controlled by **possessed noun**

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{ŋ}^\text{ə}^\text{č}^\text{e}^\text{k}^\text{i}^\circ-\text{h} \quad \text{kn}^\text{iga} \quad \text{m}^\text{an}^\text{t}^\text{e}^\text{y}^\circ-\text{q} \\
\text{child-GEN book fall-refl.3SG}
\end{array}
\]

‘Sitting at the table, the child’s book fell.’

b. Coreference controlled by **PIP**

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{ŋ}^\text{ə}^\text{č}^\text{e}^\text{k}^\text{i}^\circ-\text{h} \quad \text{kn}^\text{iga}-\text{da} \quad \text{m}^\text{an}^\text{t}^\text{e}^\text{y}^\circ-\text{q} \\
\text{child-GEN book-3SG.POSS fall-refl.3SG}
\end{array}
\]

‘When it was sitting at the table, the child’s book fell.’ (Nikolaeva 2014: 380)

### 4.1 Coreference and binding relations

In Serbo-Croatian, possessors of subjects cannot corefer with objects in the same clause:

(14) Serbo-Croatian (Despić 2013: 245)

a. * **Kusturicin**i, najnoviji film ga, je zaista razočarao.  
Kusturica’s latest film him is really disappointed  
‘Kusturica’s latest film really disappointed him.’

b. * **Jovanov**i, papagaj ga, je juče ugrizao.  
John’s parrot him is yesterday bitten  
‘John’s parrot bit him yesterday.’

Possessors of subjects can, however, bind possessive pronouns embedded in the object DP:
(15) Serbo-Croatian (Despić 2013: 259)

\[
\text{Jovanonv}_{i} \text{ papagaj je juće ugrizao } [\text{obj } \text{njegovog}_{i} \text{ brata }].
\]

John’s parrot is yesterday bitten his brother

‘John’s parrot bit his, brother yesterday.’

(14) cannot be tested in Tundra Nenets because of obviation... but (15) can. PIPs in Tundra Nenets resemble Serbo-Croatian possessors in this respect.

(16) a. Possessed noun can bind null possessive pronoun

\[
\text{Wera-h } \text{ńe’ka } [\text{obj } \text{weńako-m-ta } ] \text{ŋəwla}°
\]

Wera-GEN brother dog-ACC-3SG fed

‘Wera’s brother fed his/her dog.’

b. Overt possessive pronoun has free reference

\[
\text{Maša-h } \text{wäsako } [\text{obj } \text{pida } \text{xər’-m-ta } ] \text{xana}°
\]

Masha-GEN husband he knife-ACC-3SG take

‘Masha’s husband took his/her knife.’ (Nikolaeva 2014: 392)

- PIPs can corefer with both null and overt possessive pronouns, see (17)

(17) a. PIP corefers with null possessive pronon

\[
\text{Wera-h } \text{ńe’ka-da } [\text{obj } \text{weńako-m-ta } ] \text{ŋəwla}°
\]

Wera-GEN brother-3SG dog-ACC-3SG fed

‘Wera’s brother fed his/her dog.’

b. PIP corefers with overt possessive pronoun

\[
\text{Wera-h } \text{ńabako-da } [\text{obl } \text{pida } \text{ńa-k’nanata } ] \text{yile}°
\]

Wera-GEN sister-3SG tent-LOC.3SG live

‘Wera’s sister lives in his/her tent.’ (Nikolaeva 2014: 392)

--- Interim summary: PIPs in DP ---

PIPs show distinct syntactic behaviour from low possessors

- Switch-reference: PIPs can control embedded subjects

- Coreference: PIPs corefer with possessive pronouns in other arguments

? PIPs can even corefer with null possessors, which subjects cannot...
4.2 Analysis: PIPs controlling PRO

Assuming that PIPs are adjoined to the DP (cf. Despić 2013) and...
- ... thus not fully contained in the DP (May 1985, Chomsky 1986, Kayne 1994),
  → ... PIPs can c-command out of DP from this position.

(18) Position of PIPs in the Tundra Nenets DP

The structure in (18) allows PIPs to c-command out of DP, thus bind pronouns in other arguments and act as controllers of PRO following Landau’s (2013) definitional criteria of obligatory control:
- PRO must interpreted as bound by the controller and
- the controller of PRO must be a codependent of the clause hosting PRO

✓ Null subjects of converbial clauses are bound by the main clause subject or its PIP
✓ PIPs behave like arguments of the main clause w.r.t. obviation, i.e. “codependents” (§3)

Conclusions

PIPs are DP-internal possessors in Tundra Nenets
- Their distribution is restricted by other third person DPs
✓ We suggest this is a consequence of a syntactic obviation system
- PIPs of subjects control null subjects of converbial clauses
✓ We suggest that this follows from their adjoined position to DP
✓ PIPs can c-command out of the DP and control PRO

? Link to obviation: if two proximate DPs must corefer (Aissen 1997), ...
→ PIPs violate Principles B/C if there is another third person proximate DP
Acknowledgements — Abbreviations — References

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Zeijlstra, H. 2012. There is only one way to agree. The Linguistic Review 29(3). 491–539.